Chief's Media Scrum with City Officials
Friday, January 28, 2022

Good morning.

Ottawa is built on unceded Algonquin Anishinaabe territory.

The peoples of the Algonquin Anishinaabe Nation have lived on this territory for millennia. Their culture and presence have nurtured and continue to nurture this land.

The Ottawa Police Service honours the peoples and land of the Algonquin Anishinaabe Nation.

The OPS honours all First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and their valuable past and present contributions to this land.

As you all know, there is a major demonstration taking place over the next several days here in the Nation's capital.

In fact, demonstrators have already arrived, and we have already started to manage a series of pop-up demonstrators in the core over the last 24 hours.

The main demonstrations will commence tomorrow and could continue into next week.

We know that there will be demonstrators from across Canada, including Ottawa residents.

One of the great things about Canada is our Charter right to demonstrate and have our views heard peacefully.

That said, all rights and freedoms come with responsibilities and limitations.

Public safety is paramount in all such demonstrations.

- the safety of all the demonstrators
- the safety of the city, the community, the residents, the tourists and the businesses
- the safety of the police along with our emergency services and City of Ottawa partners.

The members of our service are duty-bound to protect the Charter, and as such, the OPS with our partners facilitate hundreds of peaceful, lawful and safe demonstrations every year, regardless of the cause.

The demonstrations this weekend will be unique, fluid, risky and significant. These demonstrations are national in scope, massive in scale, polarizing in nature and come

almost two full years into a highly stressful and tragic global pandemic.

There have been many concerns expressed in the community and many questions have been raised about what we can expect.

Here is what we do know so far about the core Freedom Convoy demonstration organizers. They have advised us that this will be a peaceful demonstration. They have confirmed that there will be a large number of trucks and participants and the main planned demonstrations will take place on Saturday and Sunday.

With demonstrations of this scale, there are significant risks to be mitigated but that we cannot eliminate. For instance, we have a major traffic plan to ensure that emergency lanes are kept open, but with thousands of trucks demonstrating in the downtown core for days, we know that there will be major traffic safety issues.

There are unique variables associated with this demonstration that can be influenced but are beyond our ability to fully control. For instance, we have been in constant communication with the core Freedom Convoy organizers. Still, there are many other parallel demonstrators we have not been able to engage with - there are also social media actors locally, nationally and

internationally who may or may not come to the demonstrations but who are inciting hate, violence and criminality.

We still do not have a confirmed estimate on the number of trucks or demonstrators. We do not have an established end date for the demonstrations- they could go through the weekend and into next week. We do not know all of the parallel demonstrations that may occur and/or the lone individuals who may insert themselves into the mix for various reasons.

We do not know what impact a demonstration of this size, scale and duration will have on public safety or on public health outcomes while we are in this latest phase of COVID.

Based on what do know so far, I can tell you that we have significantly increased the level of local, provincial and national communication and coordination commensurate to the evolving nature of the demonstration. This includes bringing in significantly more police, national security, emergency services and City resources.

Starting today and increasing over the weekend, Ottawa residents and visitors can expect to see a large police and emergency services presence in the downtown core and on major highways and roads.

As the demonstrators arrive in larger numbers today, major traffic delays and congestion will occur.

Over the course of the weekend, there will be gridlock in the core, and it will impact road usage on a large scale city-wide.

We will do everything possible to maintain emergency routes in the core, but we ask everyone NOT to visit or travel in the downtown core if you don't need to.

For those of you living or working in the downtown core, we understand your concerns, and we are working to lessen the impacts on your lives. But there will be significant impacts.

So please plan accordingly. Try to shop today - anticipate that there will be little ability for home delivery services in the core. There may be very limited vehicle, bicycle, or even pedestrian access for safety reasons in some areas close to demonstration sites.

The OPS has officers and resources available to provide police services for the rest of the city. That said, we ask that you use our 911 communications services appropriately - that you do not make unnecessary service demands during this period - that there may be delays and

gaps in services depending on the impacts of the demonstrations.

Over the past week, we have been meeting with our partners to develop an operational plan to ensure that: we have the most current information and intelligence from all sources. This information and intelligence inform the spectrum of risks, threats and variables. We then constantly update our operational plans to secure the resources in our best attempt to mitigate and eliminate the threats, risks and variables. In an event such as this, with its ever-evolving fluid and dynamic nature, there will never be a perfect plan - and we do not have unlimited resources.

As you will soon hear, we have a variety of well-developed and well-resourced plans to try to adequately and effectively address the known threats, risks and variables - plans for traffic disruption, parking problems, or more serious issues like damage to property, criminal acts and other violent behaviours.

This includes the ability to gather evidence along the travelled routes, at the demonstration sites and online/social media.

Let me be very clear, we are prepared to investigate, arrest (if necessary), charge and prosecute anyone who

acts violently or breaks the law in the demonstrations or in association with the demonstrations. We have the capability and commitment to pursue investigations and prosecutions well after the demonstrations have ended.

This event has drawn a lot of attention from mainstream media, elected officials, and social media. This is an important issue for Canadians, no matter where people live or where they personally sit on the spectrum of views.

That said, it is irresponsible to inflame this already volatile situation, and, in some cases, it may be illegal to express hate or incite criminality and violence.

We have seen in other jurisdictions where such inflammatory behaviours have led to people getting injured, killed or incarcerated. We are doing everything we can to ensure that does not happen here.

We are monitoring all intelligence and coordinating with federal, provincial and local partners to ensure that we are identifying those who could pose a threat.

We have evidentiary teams that will be videotaping all aspects of the demonstration. We will be gathering evidence should there be any acts of violence or unlawful behaviour.

We have intelligence assets and investigators who will be working throughout the entire event and in the days, weeks and months following, should there be any violence and acts of criminality associated with the demonstration.

We have consulted with the Crown Attorney's Office, and we are fully prepared, both legally and operationally, to address any risks associated with the demonstration while continuing to facilitate people's right to protest under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

We have also developed a plan to facilitate the orderly and peaceful departure from Ottawa at the end of the demonstration.

We ask that everyone who attends is respectful of each other and area residents and businesses - be respectful to our OPS officers along with our police, national security, emergency services, and City of Ottawa partners.

The OPS and our partners will do our very best to keep all people healthy and safe. That said, we have a collective responsibility to keep the community healthy and safe. We have to work together to enable everyone - demonstrators, visitors and residents - to get home safely to their families and loved ones.

We will do everything within our means to enable a peaceful, safe and healthy demonstration - this includes a timely departure of all demonstrators.

I will now hand it over to Acting Deputy Chief Trish Ferguson, who leads the OPS response to the upcoming demonstrations this weekend.

Deputy Ferguson will provide a more in-depth briefing on the planning and operational framework for the demonstrations.